

This, That, and Something Else

III

Whimsical thoughts that will resonate in your heart

By

Purnima L. Toolsidass

This, That, and Something Else

Introduction

This is a collection of assorted articles I wrote for an e- Newsletter edited by Deb Bhattacharya, who took up the task when Br. Brendan MacCarthaigh (a Christian Brother, educationalist and psychiatrist) returned to Ireland after helping innumerable people for some 60 years, mostly in Kolkata. Br. Mac's focus was value education and reducing stress faced by students, which often led to juvenile suicide.

I was asked to contribute articles because of my concern for the cause and my lifetime devotion to animal welfare and spiritual psychology. I am convinced that at the bottom of all strife is a paucity of understanding and/or compassion. These lead to interpersonal tensions and psychological aberrations.

Very often we cannot change the circumstances by we can change our perspective, which helps us to cope with unpleasant situations. This booklet is a collection of some of the articles that came to me from an unseen inner power that I am old-fashioned enough to call 'God'! We can substitute 'God' for 'the Universe', if that appeals more to the reader. The style is light and simple and I feel both confident and diffident when I state that I believe everyone will find something they will enjoy and feel better for having read it.

We all hate the hate that seems to pervade the world. We also feel helpless to do anything about it. Well, I invite you to join me in my simple faith that each of us can do quite a lot to make our little world a bit happier, kinder and more amiable. If the experts are to be believed – and I confess I do believe them – there is a strong link between the microcosm and the macrocosm, so every action of every individual can contribute to a nicer or nastier world, whether we do things consciously or unconsciously.

This quote, read when I was a little girl, stays in my mind.

'A smile is quite a funny thing; it wrinkles up your face. And, when it's gone, you'll never find its secret hiding place! But far more wonderful it is, to see what a smile can do – you smile at one, he smiles at you, and so one smile makes two!'

Let's get together and spread smiles, because life is worth the while when you can smile!

Happy reading and all the best!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

September, 2024

Health and Happiness.

We give so much thought and effort to be healthy. Good health is of the first importance in life; whether it is to get pleasure, do what we enjoy, work to improve our prospects, or anything else.

What we forget is how physical health is connected to mental health.

We all know that the day we're feeling happy, we perform better in every way, enjoy what we do, and win cooperation everywhere. Sadly, we don't give much thought to this, leaving it to chance – and the moods of those we interact with – to make us happy, grumpy or dejected.

Have you ever noticed that it is those we love most who hurt us the most; and who we take out our anger on?

Parents work untiringly so that their children will be happy and healthy in life. So much work.....and so much of it is washed away, because they don't realize that their moods are affecting their child adversely!

Orphans long to have a mother or father of their own, but the children who have parents seldom think of the sacrifices of their parents, or the love behind the sacrifices, the love behind the scoldings!

Adults and children alike feel they are justified when they get angry, become grumpy or irritable. If asked why they spoke rudely, they give their lame reasons instead of realizing that this is a question that needs to be given some thought.

There are two basic reasons for our anger/unhappiness. One is that we don't have what we want and the other is that we have what we don't want.

Getting angry is self-defeating. Psychologists tell us it is a sign of weakness, helplessness and frustration. Anger is a sign of weakness, even though it appears to be a sign of strength. It is a well-known fact that bullies are cowards at heart. If people who are slaves to their moods knew how they expose themselves, their inner vulnerability and faults every time they showed temper or started a fight, they'd be horrified! Not only horrified, they'd also feel ashamed. Furthermore, they'd feel a bit scared that everybody now knows that behind their swagger and bravado there is an underlying weakness of character and inner strength.

'There is nothing stronger than gentleness and nothing is gentler than real strength'. If we look round in a mature manner, it is seen clearly that

people who are feared are hated, and people who keep calm are respected and loved. Of course, the people who show anger seem to get quick results, but in the long run, they give and get little happiness or respect. Hot-tempered people would do well to reflect whether they want to be feared and hated, or loved and respected.

It is comparatively easy to control our temper before the temper controls us. A person who is incapable of controlling his/her temper will definitely have to rue their weakness one day. Hot tempered people harm themselves the most, the ones they love next, and the people they interact with. They become unloved and isolated and lonely and miserable, and find they no longer have the ability to change. Anger is harmful for health as well as happiness. If a happy family is the goal, it is ruined if there is just one grumpy family member! In the possible gift you can give your family, friends and others – and yourself! – is to refuse to allow yourself to be a puppet in the hands of anger!

Anger makes you say and do things you don't mean, things you feel ashamed of later, things that make you feel regret and remorse, and then you start hating your inability to stop yourself from bad behavior.

Anger is toxic. It vitiates the atmosphere in your immediate vicinity as well as universally. The fighting, hatred, and war that comes up everywhere, the road rage and outrageous attacks on innocent people, the inhuman atrocities perpetrated by humans are all caused by uncontrolled anger. When we get angry, we contribute to everything that we feel is wrong and bad.

Anyone who has to deal with elderly people will know that there are some who are always unhappy and unloved, and some who are happy and loved. Hardly anyone understands the cause.

Do you?

The cause is that people who work at always being even-tempered are happy and loved..... You can guess the rest, I'm sure!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

1.7.'23

Anger Management.

Professionals and technicians tend to make simple things very complicated. Just reading some of their involved articles gives me mental fatigue! I don't know if it is the same with you.

However, for those who agree with me about how anger ruins our peace and happiness, I would like to share some simple methods that I have found to be helpful – you're welcome to try and see which of them help you.

- 'Count ten' is an age-old formula that gives scope for tempers to cool, and to rethink the hot words that are the initial impulse.
- Drinking a little water before saying whatever comes to the mind is even better than counting ten.
- Go to the toilet and wash your face before replying.
- Tell the person you do not want to quarrel so you will answer him/her after your anger has cooled.
- I keep a Vicks cough drop in my pocket because I suffer from throat irritation. As soon as I feel anger rising, I slip one into my mouth. It is a sweet reminder to sweeten my words.
- If I am alone when I am angry I go and look at the mirror. My flushed face seems ugly – I look like someone I don't want to meet! The next time I feel angry, that face comes up before my mind's eye and I quickly cool down because I don't want to look ugly!
- For more serious occasions I have a penalty-plan. If I say something very hurtful – even if it is justified – to someone I care for, I forgo my morning cup of coffee. This gives me a headache and sometimes I have to take an aspirin for it. But the punishment is effective in controlling my temper better.
- Perhaps the most effective deterrent is to go and say sorry or write a note of apology. None of us like to say sorry or admit we were wrong. It gives a chance to the other person to gloat over us and that is quite hateful! But as a disincentive, it's excellent!
- I try to analyze what made me angry. Was it a mocking or supercilious tone? Was it because the comment had a truth that I did not want to face? Was the comment due to a misunderstanding that made me indignant? Was malice behind the comment,

maligning someone I respected? Was it justified anger at the sheer unfairness of the remark that made my anger flare up? I think of alternative retorts I could have made, which would have expressed my opinion more effectively without my needing to lose my temper.

- As soon as I lose my temper I put myself into the wrong, even if I am right. So, if I want to take a stand that the other person – and onlookers – will have to accept as valid and reasonable – it is up to me to think of how I can say what I want without putting myself into the wrong.
- By taking these measures, I have gradually been able to not only control my temper and avoid hurting loved ones. I have achieved a reputation for being a level headed person who is just and pleasant. I make fewer enemies and get better cooperation. I make my stand and people tend to listen to me more willingly than before. Life is so much more pleasant since I began to make an effort to control anger! I feel light, free of regrets, at peace, and better able to perform in whatever I undertake to do.

I hope you find my experiences helpful in making you happier, too!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

2nd May, 2022

What is Good Fortune?

‘Even more important than Bhagwan’s kripa is the awareness of His kripa.’ These words of Swami Akhandananda Saraswati can, if kept in mind, help to shift our perspective amazingly!

‘Bhagwan’s kripa is always showered on all. We don’t need to wait for it; we need to see where it is hidden, in the situation we face.’

The moment this idea sinks into the mind, we begin to investigate every setback and unpleasant situation. And, believe it or not, the brain starts to find His kripa lurking behind every irritating or hurtful incident. It becomes a delightful game of hide and seek. The irritation is forgotten in the mental exercise of finding the hidden kripa; and kripa is found without fail when one looks for it with faith.

Try it and see! If you can’t see the kripa, you can be sure that you need to build up more faith, and then it will be plain to see!

Kripa means Grace. Pondering on words like ‘kripa’, ‘kalyan’, ‘mangal’ etc – all synonyms, to indicate what we can call ‘good fortune’ or ‘blessing’, my thoughts drifted to what good fortune really is.

Is it wealth, good looks, talent, worldly success, a happy marriage, a charming personality, or is it something else?

The one thing all beings want is happiness, and we struggle all our lives to attain it. We deprive our children of our company because we are too busy working to earn to pay for their higher education, marriage, etc. We deprive them of our company, love and guidance to make money for their future happiness. Very often this results in their becoming maladjusted because they desperately want love and attention from their parents. We take them on expensive holidays that give little scope for fun and healthy bonding. We buy them expensive clothes that they dare not dirty by playing games or climbing a tree.

Climb a tree? It is quite tragic how most affluent children in our Metropolitan cities have never even thought of climbing a tree, leave alone trying it! Simple games that ring them close to nature and human nature are just not available to them – what choice do they have, except to play games on their I-phones or I-pads? They go through childhood without making real friends, who will understand them and stand by them in a crisis.

‘Born with a silver spoon in her mouth’ is considered good fortune, isn’t it? The indication is that the little girl will be brought up in comfort and luxury, which is most desirable. Yes, comfort and luxury are certainly desirable – we all want it, and there is nothing wrong in it. What is wrong is that it so often makes a child incapable of managing for herself/himself, and unable to cope with matters when faced with a crisis.

Every worldly blessing is transient none of the things we consider to be good fortune last. As long as we live, we have no option but to go through the ups and downs life brings.

That being the case, what is Bhagwan’s kripa? It is God’s Grace.

And, what form does it come in? Does it come as a worldly blessing?

It is always there, showering on all beings but people have to be aware of it to know it.

For example, you feel upset when your boss rebukes you for being incompetent, or a teacher scolds a child for being inattentive in class. The rebuked person feels aggrieved even when he knows that the rebuke was justified. He grumbles, but his work begins to improve because he knows that the consequences of not improving will be very undesirable! If he is a believer, he will know that the rebuke was God’s Grace. Had he not been rebuked, he would have slackened further and in the long run, this would have been very harmful for his future life. A non-believer, however, will just focus on the rebuke; not on the benefit derived from it.

Now, there are lots of very intelligible people who question the very existence of God. Their IQ can be as high as Einstein’s, but in my opinion, their wisdom quotient is very low. They ask, ‘can you prove that God exists?’ They have nothing to say when given a counter challenge, ‘can you prove He doesn’t exist?’

Since nobody can prove that God does, or does not exist, a person who weighs and considers the benefits or disadvantages of both is wise as well as practical. It is the prerogative of the individual to choose. Obstinate denial, just because denying His existence seems more intellectual, is sheer unthinking obstinacy. One can even consider it a kind of arrogance, because it implies that all the great men who believed in God throughout history were fools!

Ironically, this disbelief is the result of the so-called ‘God-men’. From witches, sorcerers, and witch-doctors in backward places to the most

sophisticated organizations, there have been people who did the most inhuman, unscrupulous, depraved and perverse activities, taking advantage of people's vulnerability, weakness, blind faith and simplicity.

So – they were rascals and fools! Is that any reason we should 'throw the baby out with the bath-water'?

'Though man a thinking being is defined, so few use that great prerogative of mind. So many never think of the thinking few; so many never think, that think they do!'

I believe it is God's Grace if we can think without prejudice or partiality. I believe it is God Grace if we can dare to say, 'I believe in a higher power who is all-loving, all-knowing, just, and benevolent.' I believe it is God's Grace when the thought comes, 'thank God I can enjoy today. Thank God I am in a position to brighten someone's day with a smile. Thank God I have food, clothes, a roof over my head, and people I love, who love me.'

I am grateful for this, because I can pray for the things I need and want. I have emotional security when I am isolated and lonely. I feel comforted when things go wrong, because I believe that Go does whatever is best in the long run.

'If God exists, why is there so much suffering in the world?' is a question that troubles most of us. The theory of Karma seems to be the only logical explanation. His entails accepting rebirth. We suffer because we have caused suffering in a previous life. Unless one is prepared to accept a whimsical God who is cruel and tyrannical, how can anyone explain a baby born with congenital defects, another with exceptionally intelligence, people who seem to be incredibly lucky and others who seem to be born only to suffer? Atheists offer no solution. Science cannot explain why parents may have two normal children and one who is a spastic. Nor can anybody explain the phenomena called 'luck' or 'bad luck'.

Now, my point is that faith in God is a personal option, like idealism or materialism hedonism or sadism. 'We are what we believe' is very true. Belief in a benevolent power who wants us to be happy, have universal goodwill, be compassionate, truthful ethical, upright, honest, forgiving, responsible and loving will create the kind of social order that Governments try to impose through a police force and a

judiciary system. If people believe in the noble ideals that every religious philosophy is based on, there will be no cause for strife.

I love this prayer, learnt when I was a small child. The world would be so sweet if the principle was accepted, because it is the basis of faith in the eternal values:

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

The Vedas depicts the Almighty as a male, female and neutral gender; also as a pulsation that is the origin of Creation. Being a bit of a feminist, I prefer this to the totally male version! Furthermore, the Vedas say that this power – the Brahman – pervades everything that exists, is present in all beings, and is the five elements of which everything is made. There is no Devil or Shaitan or Anti-Christ; there is only ignorance – agnan – because of which people are lead to do wrong. Removing ignorance – getting Gnan – results in developing the ability to discriminate between what is ‘right’ and should be done, and what is ‘wrong’ and should not be done. To put it simply, if I know what is good for me in the long run, I will avoid doing the things that harm me, even though they seem very tempting. Any person who is a success in any field will acknowledge that this makes good sense!

Of course, there are people who do things knowing it will harm them, but I hardly think any intelligent person would hold them up as a model of intelligence!

This may sound simplistic, but I feel the popular little prayer I give below is one example of God’s kripa:

‘May God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.’

Things become so simple when we stop using our brains to complicate them, instead of listening to the little voice within that tells us what is right!

To put it very basically, good fortune is to be able to choose the beneficial over the tempting!

Purnima L. Toolsidass.

18th November, 2024

ONLY A PERSON.....

1. Only a person who is a millionaire at heart can be eager to help others.
2. Only a person whose heart is tender can empathize with the suffering of another.
3. Only a person who has great sensitivity can sense when another person is unhappy.
4. Only a person who has known hunger can know the pleasure of feeding a hungry dog.
5. Only a person who loves reading can know what a treasure a good book is.
6. Only a person who is not afraid of hard work can achieve anything substantial.
7. Only a person who has the heart of an angel will want to do what he can to make others happy.
8. Only a person whose soul is truly great will be prepared to sacrifice his own interest in the interests of justice.
9. Only a person who has a sense of humor can laugh at himself when he does something silly.
10. Only a person who has great self-confidence can accept a rebuke without getting angry.
11. Only a person who has tremendous magnanimity can forgive and forget.
12. Only a person who has a poetic soul can appreciate poetry, music, art and beauty.
13. Only a person who is healthy enjoys outdoor activities.
14. Only a person who has enormous inner strength can be truly gentle.
15. Only a person who is bone lazy can find new excuses to shrink doing his duty.
16. Only a person who has faith in himself and in God can face all adversity without losing hope.
17. Only a person who is very foolish can think that it is smart to tell lies.
18. Only a person who is a coward becomes a bully.

19. Only a person who has a secret inferiority complex wants to show off.
20. Only a person who is dissatisfied with himself craves the admiration of others.
21. Only a person who has known fear can recognize fear in others.
22. Only a person who has great goodness in him rejoices at the good luck of others.
23. Only a petty and small-hearted person tries to take the credit of someone else's work or idea.
24. Only a person who has a staunch faith in God can stop worrying when things go wrong.
25. Only a person who has lost a loved one can understand the feelings of a person when he loses someone he loves.
26. Only a brute enjoys shouting at someone who can't retaliate.
27. Only a person who is inwardly poor can envy the well-deserved praise given to someone else.
28. Only a person who is over-conscious of the qualities he lacks becomes a hypocrite.
29. Only a person who feels he must show that he is strong needs to shout.
30. Only a person who has intelligence, wisdom, and self-control can become free of habits that harm the mind, body and soul.
31. Only a person who is organized in his habits can make the best use of time and opportunity.
32. Only a person who has tremendous fortitude can stick to a strict diet to lose weight.
33. Only a person who has a sense of adventure can dare to follow his dreams.
34. Only a person with a giant-sized ego takes offence at every little thing.
35. Only a person with great daring can dare to be innovative.
36. Only a person who is lacking in self-respect indulges in self-pity.

The Disadvantage of Advantages.

Have you ever thought of the disadvantages people face when they have some God-gifted advantage that is envied by others?

If you don't believe that advantages have disadvantages, please read the points given below and refute them if you can!

1. A good student is always expected to 'do better', and there is no end to 'better'! So, his parents and teachers tend to overlook his achievements and prod him to do 'better' all the time. As a result, he often has to give up doing the things he enjoys and feels he can never please his parents or teachers.
2. Good looks are a cause of envy. Boys want to flirt with a beautiful girl. They rarely want to discuss anything worthwhile with her, and she misses out on intellectual companionship. Good-looking men have a major problem facing jealous wives who accuse them of womanizing because other ladies find them attractive and crowd round them.
3. A rich person is always expected to foot the bill, pay the taxi fare, give lavish presents, and give loans (usually un-repaid!). If he shows that he resents being imposed upon, he is called stingy. If he is obliging he is taken for granted and exploited mercilessly. He never knows whether his friends are friendly because they like him, or because of his money. Girls flatter and chase him because he is a rich bachelor and a good prospect for a cushy marriage. As for him, he feels like the first prize at a competition! Charles Dickens expressed it beautifully in *David Copperfield*, 'with goodwill shining out of one eye and calculation out of the other.'
4. If somebody is good at cooking, he/she is given the task of cooking while others watch TV and anticipate a good meal. If some dish is not to somebody's taste, they say, 'what happened to you today?' They are quick to criticize but slow in showing appreciation. They sit as judges while the good cook labors to please their palate.
5. If a person is well-read and witty the others feel slightly inferior and inclined to belittle or ridicule if given half a chance. Alexander Pope wrote about this in his incomparable style - 'to kill with faint praise and damn with a sneer.'

6. If you are efficient you are given the responsibility of making the arrangements for every function or event. The others ask you what you plan to do, waste your time with impractical suggestions and later, tell you how you could have done it better! You have to be polite and waste your time listening to them because if you don't, you'll be called 'very haughty'!
7. If you have natural PR skills you'll be landed with the task of conciliation and appeasement between people who are not your problem. You go through considerable trouble, waste your time, face unpleasantness, and then somebody says, 'I told you this chap will manage somehow! I was right!'

The good news is that even disadvantages have advantages!

1. A poor student is mostly left alone. Nobody prods him to 'do better' continuously. Nobody asks for his help in doing their homework or explain a difficult theorem. He has no competition to face. He can enjoy doing what he likes without feeling guilty!
2. A person who is not very good-looking is able to develop his/her own personality. His/her friends like them for their own sake, not for their beauty and glamour. They are sincere, and the kind of people whose friendship is enduring. They extend help and understanding and genuine caring, because their friendship is genuine; not connected to the external appearance.
3. A person who is not particularly affluent is free of the advantage-seekers. He has no need to be wary of people who make friends with him for what they can get out of him. He can relax with them on equal terms and know that there is simple friendship between them and no vested interest.
4. A mediocre cook - or a bad one - is saved from being delegated the task of cooking. They are not expected to produce culinary marvels, nor are they blamed if something is not well done. People are thankful when he/she does the cooking, and if criticized, they can always say, 'you know I'm not a good cook. You cook next time!'
5. Not being a brilliant conversationalist is a gift because people relax with those who are on the same intellectual level. The person becomes a good listener, and a good listener is always more in demand than a good talker! In fact, a person who talks a lot is often

avoided, because everybody wants to say what they think instead of listening to what others think! A good listener is welcome everywhere; not so a good talker!

6. A not-so-efficient person is rarely burdened with responsibility. Thus, he/she is spared of hurtful blame and heady praise. They manage, somehow to do what is needed to be done, and are more understanding and helpful than highly efficient people who can be obnoxiously condescending and snooty!
7. Without any particular PR skills a person generally remains amicable, helpful and tolerant. Tricky relationships are avoided because the person is more straightforward. The person has little or no need to enter the 'blame game' that slick talkers need to indulge in to keep up their own position.

Purnima L. Toolsidass

May 2024

Etiquette for Animals and Us

should a cassowary curtsy to a camel?
Should a porpoise say "good morning" to a shark?
Should a salamander bow to a solitary cow
If he meets her in the village after dark?

Should barnacles wear billycocks or bowlers?
Should centipedes wear wellingtons or what?
If a lobster's out to tea, and he's got a cold, should he
Be allowed to keep his muffler on or not?

Should rhinoceroses bathe in public places?
Is a porcupine at parties quite the thing?
If a llama comes to call and he hasn't washed at all
Does it matter if one doesn't hear him ring?

Should a dolphin dilly-dally with a dogfish?
Should a caterpillar parley with a snail?
If a guinea-pig should talk with a squirrel as they walk,
Should the squirrel raise the topic of a tail?

Should hyenas laugh at things that are not funny?
Say, an antelope eloping with an elk?
Should storks go in for stilts and should grouse adopt the kilts?
May a winkle pull a cracker with a welk?

(From Punch)

This delightful poem has some valuable tips for us!

Humans are also animals, and it is worth our while to ponder a bit on
whether etiquette is important, and if so, why.

The first thought that comes to my mind is the reaction people have to
those whose behavior is refined and to those whose behavior lacks
dignity and culture. Go to any public place, or get on to a bus or metro.
You will see people move aside politely for people who conduct

themselves with a certain dignity, while rudely jostling those who are obviously brash and uncouth.

Look a bit more carefully and see whether it is because of the dress of the person, the jewelry, make-up, expensive and stylish clothes, or what? You will notice that a person who is elegant invariably gets a more polite response than a person who is loaded with a flashy watch or chain and designer clothes.

Even an uneducated person knows the difference instinctively and responds accordingly.

Very often people try to put on an impressive air, but be it a bus conductor or a waiter in a restaurant or a salesman in a shop – nobody is impressed by false aggrandizement. I noticed this years ago when I went to a temple and was pushed aside by two wealthy ladies whose ears and hands flashed diamonds. They felt their wealth entitled them precedence with the deity. Just then, another lady came and stood by me. She was dressed simply, wore modest jewelry and there was nothing particularly impressive about her. She caught the eye of the priest and told him gently that she wanted the flowers she had brought to be offered to the deity.

To my surprise, the priest smiled and took her offering, ignoring the large basket being offered by the wealthy, pushy duo.

Going back after darshan I wondered at the priest's behavior. I am sure the wealthy ladies would have given a bigger dakshina than that gentle lady. Then – what made the priest give her priority in spite of the fact that her tip would have been quite nominal?

I began to notice the behavior of waiters, saleswomen, cinema ushers, and others who were in constant contact with all kinds of people and all kinds of behavior. The result was generally uniform in cultured people getting better service.

Going up the scale, I found that even in the work place, a man or woman who is cultured – in short, has etiquette – is better respected and gets better cooperation.

Humility is at a premium. Rudeness results in getting the back up of a person who is compelled to serve and be polite even when treated as an inferior.

And, the same applies to a stray or pet dog! The dog becomes friendly if greeted in a friendly way, but begins to growl if a man shouts at it or shows an aversion to it.

How simple, how obvious, and yet how few realize this!

Down the ages, we have seen different kinds of culture and mannerisms, and accepted unthinkingly that the more refined people get greater respect. Then, why is it that we don't try to improve our own culture, our own mannerism, our own etiquette?

What does it cost us to smile and say 'please' or 'thank you'? What does it cost to remain in a queue instead of pushing others to get ahead? If you stamp on someone's foot and say 'sorry' with a smile, you'll get a smile back, but if you abstain this little courtesy, you'll probably be asked roughly, 'what do you think you're doing, Mr.?' and maybe get pushed. Which do you think is more pleasant – for you and for the other person?

So then – what is culture? I have seen people who are highly educated, musicians, artists of different kinds, educationalists, doctors, psychologists and other experts in their fields. I have seen politicians and Club Committee members whose talk is like honey when they want your vote, and utterly cold when you ask for some help or point out something they don't want to know! All too often, highly 'cultured' people talk sneeringly, belittling someone less polished or unable to answer back. To me, they seem not at all cultured!

Perhaps real culture is sensitivity for the feelings of another. It is an understanding of the fact that every being has feelings, and gets hurt when dealt with abrasively. The innate self-respect in every being demands a like respect for all life; nay, even inanimate objects deserve to be treated with respect! A beautiful bowl, a picture, a copper vessel, a statue, a carpet and furniture all deserve respect. When we don't treat

people, animals and things with respect we hurt our own dignity as an intelligent human being who is a sentient being with an awareness of treating others the way we would like to be treated.

‘Etiquette For Animals’ is fun to read, and interesting to reflect on. Thick-skinned, uncultured people will probably find it boring!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

September, ‘23

Childish Adults

Charming indeed is the innocence of little children, but there are some people who don't seem to outgrow their childish behavior. They suffer and so do the people who have to interact with them! I am sure we have all had the experience of senior people whose behavior most irritating, but had to be endured!

Forcing ourselves to endure immature behavior becomes a stress. Sooner or later, we become impatient and snap at them, no matter how much we love them! This causes hurt and resentment and spoils relationships. The senior concerned is utterly bewildered as to why the affectionate younger person suddenly became irritated, and the younger person feels both relief and remorse! It is nobody's fault, but both suffer.

We cannot tell older people that they are behaving in an immature way because we don't want to hurt them. Older people also love us – perhaps more than we love them – but they can't understand why we get irritated. Both feel trapped.

Old people are more vulnerable emotionally. They feel helpless and rejected. The younger generation feels helpless, too. They love their parents but have so much more on their mind that it is difficult to cope with childish old people – or even the not-so-old who still behave like a ten year old, but you can't snub!

Love, understanding and goodwill are among life's greatest treasures. We can protect these by being alert in our interaction. A little introspection and vigilance achieves tremendous compatibility. Some points occurred to me, which I'd like to share with you.

The first sign of maturity is to not talk about yourself so much. Do not repeat yourself, and don't be inquisitive. This will give a lot of relief to the youngsters you love.

The second sign is to actually listen to what the other person is saying, instead of going on talking.

The third sign is to think and respond objectively.

The fourth sign is to stop being judgmental. Don't compare your life with the lives young people lead today.

The fifth sign is to feel compassion for those who suffer as well as those who make others suffer. Youngsters face more pressure than ever before. Help them by being less demanding and more understanding.

For us all, who live in this world full of brash and impatient people -

‘The sign of good manners is to be patient with bad ones’ – I’d read this long ago and struggled to implement it. Then I read another quotation: ‘The problem with good manners is that they are not intelligible to all classes of people’.

This is a quandary to which we have to find our own answer!!

Have a nice day!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

4th August, 2024.

Budgets!

The recent budget set off a chain of thoughts. The Government taxes the people and uses the income for welfare projects. Wise householders budget their income and keep something in the Bank for any emergency that may come up. I have heard of the theory that income should be divided into five portions. 1. Monthly expenses, 2. Investments, 3. Charity, 4. Pleasure and 5. Savings.

My thoughts drifted to the youngsters. They don't have to worry about any income yet, because their parents take care of the finances. Yet, they also have many things that they'd benefit by budgeting.

What? You'll wonder.

Well, working out how to spend their time, intelligent, good health, studies, other interests, etc. are some of the things that can all be developed for optimum long term benefits if well planned.

Twenty four hours is what we all have in a day. We seldom think of how much of it we waste without even noticing, and then we hurry through the more important things depriving ourselves of the chance to enjoy or do necessary tasks.

Our intelligence can be honed by using it to sharpen it, or it can be allowed to get dulled by spending our time in activities that don't need any application of our intelligence. Good health is a great asset because nothing can be done without it. We can't enjoy life unless we're healthy. We all know that! But do we ever think about whether we're doing anything to maintain good health, or do we fritter away this priceless gift by indulging in activities that harm it?

Studies are inevitable. Even a half-wit knows that we need to do well in our studies to get a well-paying job and succeed in life. It is sad that so many intelligent students use methods like cheating to get good marks in exams, not realizing that the marks are not backed by the knowledge that will be required when we get a job and need to prove our ability.

Then, there are other interests, which are equally necessary for a healthy mind and body, for social acceptability and to be free of the pain of loneliness and boredom!

If these – and others I've not mentioned here – can be budgeted, how much happier, healthier, and better off we'd all be!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

19th February, '24.

DANGER ZONES

I came across a poem written by a young adult. I found it very profound.
Here it is:

ON YELLING

She thought about how
The louder she screamt,
The lesser she was heard.

He had read somewhere that
People's voices increase
When their distance increased.

She wanted to say
"I'm too angry to talk,
Give me some time, I should take a walk."

He thought about saying
"I'm sorry for screaming
This isn't me, its frustration speaking."

But anger - it came,
And they were no longer 'them'
They were words with noise
And air looking for a vent.

Too soon, it was too late
It was a room with empty walls

And it echoed of sounds
That nobody heard.

By Richa.

From the poem it sounds as though the poem was written by a young wife whose marriage broke up. It set me thinking about how we all - no exceptions - hurt the people we love the most when we get burdened by the behavior of other people. People we have to interact with seem to be the most unreasonable and infuriating people in the city. 'Why did this man/woman have to be my boss?' is a cry most of us will be familiar with. Then everything that person says or does seem irritating and wrong. We lose our ability to be objective and the more we try to suppress our irritation the worse it becomes. And, who suffers? Those we love the most, because we feel safe in letting off steam with them.

None of this is fair or rational, yet we feel 'upset' when our loved ones react when we take out our irritation on them. We flare up, because we take our loved ones for granted and expect them to 'understand' when we're upset; how silly! Do we understand them, when they're upset? Oh, no! It's always the other person who 'should' have understood!!

And talking of 'should', how many of us do what we should, anyway? It would be laughable if it wasn't so sad - we justify our own faults, but say, 'don't make excuses' when someone else justifies his/her lapse. The fact is, most of the time very few of us are 'justified' in most of the things we do, and most of us are too dense to realize this, and so, misunderstanding, quarrels, unhappiness and regret replace the love and happiness that we all deserve.

There are other 'danger zones' - jealousy, pride, greed, desire, envy, laziness, telling lies etc. All these seem to be unimportant, so we don't bother to give them a thought. That is the greatest 'Danger Zone'; and thoughtless, frenzied seeking of 'a good time', or 'making a quick buck' often leads to a crash that can leave permanent scars at best, or severe mental damage, or worse.

Pondering on this, I had a brilliant brainwave, if I do say so myself!! I'll tell you about it in case you'd like to use it for your own benefit (you see, I'm not all selfish!). I have decided that every time I'm stopped at a red light, instead of grumbling or using bad language, I'll think about the 'Danger

Zone' I'm facing that day. It may be anxiety, impatience, frustration, an unpleasant task, or something else. I will train my mind to subdue the negative responses and play a game with myself.

'Play a game with yourself, sitting in a bus, or scooter, or in the car?' you'll ask incredulously.

Yes, my friend - it's a game we can all play and enjoy.

'What's the game?'

It's my own version of 'Patience'! I'm going to pit myself against my mood and see who wins. If I lose, I'll suffer anyway and if I win I'll treat myself to a jumbo ice cream!

'Yes, but what is this game - tell me that!'

The game is whether I can think and behave calmly when I feel like shouting and screaming! It is whether I can speak pleasantly when the other person is rude and unreasonable. It is whether I can explain things to a person who seems to be deliberately obtuse without getting irritated, whether I can deal with the problems of the day, one at a time, without getting stressed out by the pile of work that grows steadily. These are just some of the games I'm setting for myself. I daresay I'll think of more as I keep winning the ones I have in mind at the moment.

The jumbo ice cream is not merely physical. It is also a fantastic long term reward I'll be getting, because I'll save myself from incalculable regret and remorse. I'll save the people I love the most from getting hurt and becoming unhappy. I'll save myself from blood pressure and other ailments that come from mental agitation, saving money I'd have to spend on doctors, tests and medicines!

Don't you think that's a very good game to play? The greatest prize will be that I will be out of the Danger Zones that threaten to wreck our life and peace of mind and success in life.

Purnima L. Toolsidass

June 2024

My Life and Me.

I have been asked to write an article for 'Business Economics', on a subject of my choice. The dictionary explains 'business – matter requiring attention', and 'economics – pecuniary position and management. Delighted to be given an opportunity to contribute to such a prestigious magazine I venture to 'rush in where angels fear to tread'.

I write what I feel, and what I feel is what I have understood from the talks and books of my Guruji, Swami Akhandanand Saraswati. He was the one from whom I could get answers to so many things that puzzled me and made me question social attitudes. When I saw sorrow in the eyes of the poor, I felt that poverty was the cause. Then I saw merriment in the eyes of many street-dwellers, and wondered. When I went to Birla Park and Singhanian House to hear Maharaji's katha, I saw people whose eyes were filled with sorrow, even though many of them were extremely wealthy. I wondered what personal tragedies could have been the cause.

Then, there was a spate of books on how to succeed, explaining how to overcome defects, think big, and learn to evaluate future trends. 'Success' was synonymous with wealth, but wealth is not synonymous with happiness, and since happiness is the goal of every human being, the arithmetic seemed all wrong to me.

So, coming back to the 'matter requiring attention' and 'pecuniary position and management', it seems that the economics of our business – the business that leads to happiness – has become lopsided, which explains the restlessness, wariness and dissatisfaction in the eyes of so many who are blessed with so much.

The matter that requires our attention the most is developing the right perspective, understanding where we are failing, and what the goal of our life is. We need to locate the source of our emptiness and dissatisfaction and deal with the things that block our sukha – an ambiguous word that combines complete contentment, satisfaction and serenity.

To do that, we have to know what sukha comprises of. Good health, financial security, emotional security, contentment, absence of fear, self-respect, and peace of mind – these are a rough outline of the things that contribute to happiness. Strange as it may seem, the first two are seen to be rather less important than the other factors,

As soon as I began to analyze these things in myself, a long list of factors came up in my mind. All I had seemed trifling when balanced against what I didn't have! Slowly, Maharajji's messages percolated into my brain – that great mischief maker, always misguiding me by scoffing at that I instinctively know to be right and proper – and I began to understand that I was giving more importance to superficialities than to the fundamental issues. I realized that I would continue to feel inadequate until I obtained inner peace, and inner peace was a mirage unless and until I shifted my focus from myself to those not directly connected to me.

Fortunately for myself, I had an instinctive love for animals and for justice, since my early childhood. Seeing the suffering inflicted on other, weaker species by human beings aroused a deep anger. 'How can we be called humans if we repay all the benefits we get from animals by inflicting more and more cruelty on them in countless ways?' I thought. I spoke about this to Maharajji, and he told me to work for animal welfare as a worship of Him, who abides in all beings. Since the work was done as a worship, I was saved from the perils of developing any ego, or anger at the non-cooperation of people, or disappointment for slow progress.

Going deeper into animal related issues, I realized the multiple areas of animal exploitation. I understood how many of them could be avoided (like non-vegetarian food and becoming a vegan). I realized how focusing on how we can reduce the suffering of another helps to shift the focus from our own disappointments and disillusion. I found myself enriched emotionally and no longer bothered about so many things that troubled me. I also found that the feelings of inadequacy and need to impress others were non-issues. I felt that my life had a purpose; that I was not a helpless left driven by the winds of fate and the opinion of other people. This was liberating to the point of intoxication, but the immense need of the animals kept my feet firmly on the ground and saved me from any feeling of elation. Worship is rewarded when it is sincere – this is what I felt my Swamiji was telling me. The achievements were His Grace.

That is when the thought came, that the benefit of the person who tries to help another is far greater than the person benefited directly by our efforts, provided there are no extraneous considerations. The self-defeating feelings are jealousy, greed, pride, vanity, hatred and fear. All these can be removed when we feel inner satisfaction and self-respect. And, these can come only when our mind shifts its focus from the material to the metaphysical. When we think about the enormous suffering of so many others, our own pales in comparison. When our mind is occupied with

plans for helping others, it is no longer troubled by personal problems, many of which are imaginary and nothing more than a matter of perspective.

In our own way, we all strive to find a place in our world, and do whatever good we can. We do this unconsciously, but fail to achieve our potential because of our tendency to give priority to the '*pre`yas`*' (pleasant), instead of the '*shre`yas`*' (beneficial). We forget the story of the child Dhruv; we don't realize that we are all like 'Uthanapada', who rejects Suniti (*su-neeti*) for Suruchi (*su-ruchi*), the right for the pleasant. The son of Suruchi was 'Uttam' – excellent – and the son of Suniti was Dhruv – the enduring.

In the Valmiki Ramayana, Sitaji tells Shri Rama, '*Smaarayate` na tu shikshayate`*' - I am reminding you, not telling you.'

By God's Grace, every human being instinctively knows what is right and what is wrong. When we go to spiritual discourses and read the works of the Mahatmas, we find confirmation of what our heart has always told us. Now, it is up to me to choose whether I want to ignore the inner voice and continue to carry the burden of worldly cares, or whether I desire inner peace enough to change some of my habits and priorities!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

November, 1986